

STATE OF MICHIGAN



JOHN ENGLER, Governor

DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY*"Better Service for a Better Environment"*

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RUSSELL J. HARDING, Director

REPLY TO:

SURFACE WATER QUALITY DIVISION
KNAPP'S CENTRE
PO BOX 30273
LANSING MI 48909-7773

US EPA RECORDS CENTER REGION 5



487136

June 4, 2001

Mr. Dave Dempsey
Michigan Environmental Council
119 Pere Marquette, Suite 2A
Lansing, Michigan 48912

Dear Mr. Dempsey:

Thank you for your May 21, 2001 letter regarding the water and sediment quality of the Detroit River. We share these same concerns and are currently focusing cleanup efforts on contaminated sediments at the BASF/Riverview location. We have requested a \$4 million appropriation in the Clean Michigan Initiative funds to remove this contamination and expect to initiate our sediment cleanup in early 2002.

Currently, Detroit River sediment data on dioxin by Michigan State University researchers (Kamman, 2001) shows dioxin widespread in upper Detroit River sediments from Belle Isle downstream. These amounts represent very low concentrations (parts per trillion). Similar low levels of dioxin were detected in sediments from 13 stations along the Detroit River in a 1994 report by the Ontario Ministry of Environment and Energy.

The primary risk to humans from dioxins, however, is not from contact at the nearby boat site or ingestion of river water, but rather through eating contaminated fish. Fish tissue samples were collected in 1995 from a number of areas in the Detroit River, as well as Monguagon Creek and Lake Erie. A variety of fish species, including bullheads, largemouth bass, muskie, pumpkinseed, pike, rockbass, walleye, and yellow perch were sampled. None of these fish samples exceeded the Department of Community Health "trigger level" (a toxicity equivalency threshold concentration for fish tissue dioxins of greater than 10 parts per trillion (ppt)). Carp collected at Grassy Island in 1994, showed four of ten fish sampled exceeded this 10 ppt level. As a result, there is a fish advisory for carp from the Detroit River. Even these concentrations are lower than those levels reported for Great Lakes trout and whitefish.

The strategy we are using on the Detroit River is to prioritize our sediment remediation efforts on those areas most contaminated. The most contaminated area is the BASF/Riverview site, where the main sediment contaminant is mercury. Mercury is present at high concentrations in the sediments from the historical releases and activities of the manufacturing facilities that operated there and upstream. This area holds the largest known mass of mercury impacting the fish in the Detroit River. The distribution of other contaminants like dioxins in the Detroit River suggests the presence of multiple historic sources of low level contamination.

Our cleanup efforts will focus on the large residual mercury contamination and other contaminants like dioxins will also be removed. We are scheduled to take sediment samples to confirm a successful cleanup and will continue to monitor Detroit River fish as part of our Fish Contaminant Monitoring Program.

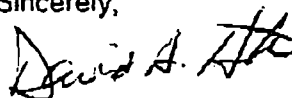
Mr. Dave Dempsey

Page 2

June 4, 2001

If you have additional questions or concerns, please contact Mr. Mark Oemke, Great Lakes and Environmental Assessment Section, at 517-335-4206, or you may contact me.

Sincerely,



David A. Hamilton, Chief
Surface Water Quality Division
517-335-4176

dah:mo:ls

cc: Ms. Bettie Williamson
Ms. Tracey Kroll
Ms. Loretta Helstowski
Ms. Jean Jackson
Mr. Mark Oemke, Department of Environmental Quality